



Rep. John Shadegg

Press Release

For Immediate Release:
July 26, 2002

Contact:
John Pappas
202-225-3361

Shadegg Introduces Bill to Allow Forest Thinning in Western States

WASHINGTON – U.S. Congressman John Shadegg (R-AZ) along with House Resources Committee Chairman Jim Hansen (R-UT) and Forestry Subcommittee Chairman Scott McInnis (R-CO) introduced legislation today that would prohibit lawsuits that block necessary forest thinning projects in the Western United States.

On Wednesday it was revealed that Senator Majority Leader Tom Daschle included language in the Emergency Supplemental appropriations bill (which has been sent to the President) that would exempt forest thinning from environmental challenges, but only in his home state of South Dakota. Daschle even stated that his legislation will "avoid costly, time-consuming lawsuits" and "get the forest thinned and property protected."

"I am thrilled that Senator Daschle now agrees that lawsuits, which have prevented responsible thinning of forests are partly responsible for devastating wildfires. I only wish he had the similar concern for the people of other states where fires are consuming millions of acres," said Shadegg

Because Daschle's language was parochial and only included lawsuit relief for South Dakota, Shadegg and others introduced their bill today to help Western states. Shadegg noted that in the last 7 months more than 3.8 million acres of land have been consumed by fire in the West.

Shadegg's bill, the "Wildfire Prevention and Forest Health Protection Act of 2002" closely follows the path laid by Daschle. Similarly, the bill would fully exempt all Western states from every type of lawsuit that could be filed to stop a thinning project. It would also remove the jurisdiction of any U.S court to hear such a lawsuit. Unlike Daschle's legislation, Shadegg's bill requires that before a project can move forward the Regional National Forester must certify, on the basis of the best scientific evidence available, that thinning is needed to maintain the health of the forest.

"This bill is critical to the future health of our forests. We are only in the middle of this year's fire season and every indicator points to another bad situation next year. Something must be done to stop the devastation," said Shadegg.

He added, "If tree thinning constitutes responsible forest management policy for South Dakota, then it is good policy for Arizona and the West. Considering his enlightenment on the importance of forest thinning, I would expect that Mr. Daschle would champion our cause in the Senate,"

The Wildfire Prevention and Forest Health Protection Act of 2002 will be scheduled for consideration in the House Resources Committee in early September, when Congress returns from the Summer recess.

###